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USDA Inside USDA Information

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READ ABOUT...

Freedom of Information report activities...4th International Food and Agricultural Trade Show...more meetings with AAM visitors...and a bit of this-and-that, some nonsense, and chit-chat...these are items you'll read about inside "Inside..." this issue.

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Not all information officers handle Freedom of Information (FOI) requests made to USDA agencies, but most are interested in getting information to people as readily as possible.

For those of you unacquainted with Freedom of Information, it's a law that requires the feds to provide the public with just about anything requested.

Reserve FREEDOM OF INF...

Attitude generally holds that that's a good thing, but sometimes there are a few exceptions, like holding back on requests for copies of investigations that are going to be needed in a court of law...or materials that might invade the privacy of individuals.

Each agency has a Freedom of Information officer--sometimes it's a bonafide information officer...sometimes it's someone else--who handles the first or initial requests people send in. If an initial request is denied, the requester has the right of appeal. If an appeal is denied, the administrator of the agency involved has to make the denial with the approval of USDA's Office of the General Counsel and GPA. If everyone agrees to deny, the plan must go to the Justice Department who will defend the case in the event it ever comes to trial.

Each agency has an FOI officer and the right to field requests, because the agencies handle the programs people ask about. That's a little different than the way other departments manage FOI...often they have a central FOI office. But annually, USDA has to submit a combined report of denials to Congress. The report gets pulled together by GPA.

...AND 1978 DENIALS

Now the good news. Last year initial denials totalled 658. We say that's "good news" because in 1977, there were 1,230 initial denials.

Also, in 1978 there were only 90 appeals compared to 117 in 1977. Of the appeals, only 18 held up...that is, the denials were held up in 18 cases. Last year the figure was 29.

Goal, of course, is to keep cutting out denials and to give out information even more freely.

We don't have a total for the number of requests made and for which information is given without question. Too bad, because that might make us look like we're actually doing a pretty good job.

* * *

During the American Agriculture Movement (AAM) encampment on the mall, Washington had a couple of heavy snowfalls...tied up traffic one night last week almost to the point of making folks think this was Chicago.

SORRY BUD, WE WORK
HERE

Barry Jenkins of GPA's press division comes in at the crack of dawn every day to produce Ag a.m., that news summary we wrote about recently. Because of the snow, Barry dressed more informally than usual...boots, dungarees, heavy woolen shirt, and all the other necessities for cold weather bravery.

As he pounded out the day's early news, he had the feeling someone was watching, so he looked up. There stood a security man... a member of D.C.'s finest...eyeing Barry suspiciously.

To make an obvious story short, Barry had to show his USDA pass and practically sign his life away to convince the guy he was authorized to be in the building at such an early hour. (Yes, Ag a.m. got out on time.)

* * *

AAM members last week...and the week before...began stopping people in the halls to explain how much of the food dollar farmers receive, how much exports amount to, what farmers' costs are all about...and so on and on. They had the figures from USDA materials pretty well memorized...and a few new ideas too.

FARMERS LEARN WHAT
URBANITES GET

Still...a frequent charge held that USDA wasn't explaining the contributions of agriculture to the general public.

So...Ted Crane, Joe McDavid, and Larry Quinn reported in a session with AAM people a bit of what's been issued lately.

A few of the items laid out for the farmers changed a few opinions...direct mailings to schools and educational journals that teachers read...brochures by the dozen explaining corn and hog farming, exports, growing citrus, broiler production, raising beef cattle...plans for similar booklets on wheat farming, vegetable growing, and cotton farming...plus more than a few others on relation of productivity on the farm to the general economic well-being.

Yep...we still need to do more, but that's the heckuv it. When we produce something that doesn't talk to ourselves, our own folks often don't see it and say we're not doing anything. (Reminds us of something someone once said..."the biggest communication fallacy is "but I told them."")

* * *

ANYONE TO THE BIG SHOW?

Everybody seemed to be mixed up with the big International Food and Agricultural Trade Show...at least the southern state depts. of ag were. Sponsored by the Southern U.S. Trade Assoc., more than 200 foreign buyers viewed 124 exhibits in New Orleans recently. "Inside..." will welcome comments about the show...if anyone wants to comment. We'll pass them on.

* * *

If you read last week's press reports, you saw the story about the \$510,000 contract for a pilot, multi-media campaign to get children to eat better.

The project, sponsored by FNS, could set the pace for ways to reach people better in the future because it couples advertising with research. The ad agency involved is Needham, Harper and Steers, Inc. The research outfit is the American Institutes for Research in the Behavioral Sciences.

MULTI-MEDIA CAMPAIGN COMING UP ON NUTRITION

Research studies will work on why children eat what they do and where they get information about the foods. Then the ad agency will dole out proposals for multi-media messages to encourage kids, 5-12, to eat breakfast, nutritious snacks, and more fruits and vegetables.

Actual production of the messages will come next year...or at least after the present contract terminates, about next October.

Keep tuned.

* * *

REGIONAL COMMENT

A note from Don Nielson, APHIS, who's located at Mission, Texas, thanked "Inside..." for the rundown of regional information actions reported in letter #13...he said, "This clarifies rumors."

Well, old hoss, "Inside..." doesn't know what rumors we clarified, but we do have a lot of work to do in setting up the USDA regional information offices without screwing up the fine agency regional activities that already exist.

As a matter of fact, it already has occurred to a number of folks that the addition of five GPA folks to present numbers should ease things up for present regional offices who are handling queries that don't relate to their agencies. So overall aim is to improve what we've already got.

* * *

PRC NOW CHINA... TAIWAN IS TAIWAN

GPA's international watcher, Larry Marton, tells us that the State Dept. has issued guidelines about how to refer to some of the countries of the Far East. Seems the "Republic of China" is now to be referred to as Taiwan...the "People's Republic of China" is China, although that's iffy, so to speak, and the old form "may sometimes be appropriate."

Oh yeah...China has adopted its own method for romanizing Chinese names ("pinyin")...preferable for persons from the PRC and PRC place-names (wups, we mean China). Then, the Wade-Giles system,

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PROCUREMENT SECTION
CURRENT SITUATION RECORDS

ASCS INFO MEMO
CHANGES

BURNOUT KING OF YEAR?

IT'S COIK TIME AGAIN

MAY BACKGROUNDER
ABOUND

long in general use for transliterating Chinese into English, should be used for personal and place-names relating to Taiwan and for other Chinese names, except where local or personal variations have been customary in places like Singapore and Hong Kong. (Well...we'll be double-dashed.)

* * *

There's a new look beginning to emerge in the ASCS information packet sent to field ASCS folks charged with getting information to farmers. For many years, INFO MEMO has been sent around filled with press announcements, radio scripts, and other instructions.

Now Ray Waggoner and Dean Quirin have sharpened up the cover page with a listing of contents and guidelines and inside have begun to insert instructions on how the material is to be used. Edith Brown handles the packet. Indications are more changes are coming.

* * *

Not long ago Univ. of Maryland's Bob Rathbone wrote: "...you're off base in approaching 'burnout' as a problem. That's a normal condition for most of us in this business. The question isn't 'are you?' but rather, 'what degree--first, second, or third?' The positive approach is to identify and honor the Burnout King of the Year."

Bob said further, "You can see that I'm a candidate." (Aren't we all?)

* * *

And retiree Ralph Reeder, Purdue, sent us a clipping from the Indianapolis Star poking more fun at alphabetical acronyms.

Seems as though a newsletter from the American Council on Education (ACE) pled for more funding from HEW (Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare) by writing: "...HEW had better be PDO in coughing up more \$\$\$ for SEOGs, BEOGs, and GSLs." The Star reported further: "In addition to ACE...(a) panel spoke in behalf of AAHE, AACTE, AACJC, AASCU, AAC, AAU, ACCU, AJCU, NAEHOHE, NACUBO, NAICU, NASCUMC, NASULGC and NASFAA. Translation? None given, none wanted." (An outstanding example of COIK--Clear Only If Known.)

* * *

AMS, according to Dale May, is starting a new method to inform folks how they can participate in public hearings to consider rulemaking proposals. Called "backgrounders," the papers are for short-term use and are distributed through regional offices.

First Backgrounder had to do with proposed wheat research and nutrition education--authorized by law in 1977 to improve quality and make efficient use of American wheat for food purposes.